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Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D.C. 20505

Executive Director

4 November 1986

Memo For: PFIAB

Attention: Sandie

From: Office of the Executive Director

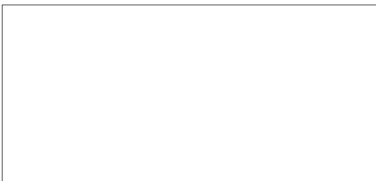
Attached are reports pursuant to your recent request:

"Is Iraq Losing the War?"
"Iran's Military Options"

I am waiting for Orcon release on one other document and will send it as soon as we obtain the release.

We would appreciate the return of these documents when you are finished with them.

Thanks very much.



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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

31 July 1986

25X1 Iran's Military Options [REDACTED]

Summary

Iran has begun preparations for a major offensive amid unusually frequent and strident public declarations by the leadership that they intend to win the war by next spring. Tehran probably believes its own economic constraints and Iraq's worsening economic, military, and political situation argue for a decisive push, but Iranian leaders may still be trying to reach a consensus on its timing and size. We believe that Iran has two major options--a massive assault or a series of small to medium-size attacks to achieve a significant breakthrough of Iraqi defenses. Iran is capable of executing either option, but chances are better than even that it would achieve some successes with the smaller attacks. Its chances of success with a massive assault probably are less. Even two or three modest victories, would erode Iraqi morale and diminish the political standing of Saddam Husayn. Under such circumstances, Iran would be emboldened in the war, and perhaps be encouraged to increase terrorist and sabotage operations against the other Gulf states and US interests in the region. [REDACTED]

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25X1 This paper was prepared by [REDACTED] of the Persian Gulf
 25X1 Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Comments and queries are
 25X1 welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Persian Gulf Division, NESA, [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]

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Iranian Perceptions

"...the two successful operations in Al Faw and Mehran more or less made it clear to all that the Islamic Republic of Iran is capable of ending this war through military means."

--Majlis Speaker Hashemi
Rafsanjani,
15 July 86

In our judgment, the regime in Tehran sees itself on the verge of winning the war and believes that it can, despite obstacles, launch a massive assault or series of medium-size attacks that will achieve a significant breakthrough of Iraq's defenses. Recent military successes have fueled this perception. The victories at Al Faw and Mehran have bolstered public support for the war, improved morale in some Iranian units, and increased the influence of hardliners pushing for a "final" victory. Tehran apparently believes that Iraq's military is weakening and will be especially vulnerable over the next six to eight months. [REDACTED]

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The clerical regime in Tehran also seems convinced that Saddam's political control is faltering, and that another significant victory will hasten his political demise, creating turmoil within the Ba'hist regime. Iranian leaders know, too, that Iraqi economic problems are severe and that the Iraqi government is having difficulty sheltering the population from the demoralizing effects of austerity. [REDACTED]

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At the same time, Iran's clerical leaders may calculate that their own economic problems may lead to domestic unrest and a decline in support for the war if it is not brought to a successful conclusion within the next six to eight months. Majlis Speaker Rafsanjani stated recently that "the appropriate solution is to end the war with victory before the economic pressure starts affecting us." Iranian oil export earnings will fall to about \$8.5 billion this year--barely enough to maintain imports of food, necessities, and military goods. Tehran realizes that continued low oil prices, which are not likely to recover for at least one to three years, will make the purchase of large quantities of weapons and munitions increasingly difficult. In turn, shortages of these items will reduce its ability to launch large offensives or to exploit smaller tactical successes. [REDACTED]

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Iranian Preparations and Capabilities

The Iranians are beginning preliminary preparations for another offensive, but probably will not be ready to launch a massive assault until at least this fall. Khomeini has reaffirmed his desire to continue the war, and Supreme Defense Council members Rafsanjani and Reza'i have publicly proclaimed that Iran is preparing its forces for the "year of victory." [REDACTED] Tehran is mobilizing large numbers of men--including university students and as much as 30 percent of its male government work force--and will continue to do so during August, trying to increase its manpower advantage by adding some 1 million men to its military. [REDACTED]

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Iranian leaders may still be trying to reach a consensus on the timing and size of the offensive. [REDACTED] disagreement on this issue continues among some of the leaders. Rafsanjani and others, especially the Revolutionary Guard, are pushing for a bold strike aimed at achieving a quick victory. President Khamenei and his supporters, and most regular army commanders--as they have in the past--are probably urging a conservative approach to avoid enormous casualties or a potentially disastrous loss. In any event, the Iranians have apparently learned an important lesson from past failures; they will try to insure that the Army and the Revolutionary Guard coordinate plans and cooperate in the attack's execution. Perhaps as part of this effort, Ayatollah Khomeini recently, in a rare public appearance, made a strong plea for unity between the Army and the Guard. [REDACTED]

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Despite significant equipment shortages and logistics problems, Iran probably can amass sufficient supplies to launch one massive assault involving 150,000 or more men, or a series of smaller, multi-divisional attacks. Tehran's recent success in acquiring long-range Austrian field guns and improvement in its arms relationship with China may have eased somewhat its concern about husbanding equipment. We believe that reequipping a few elite units or acquiring additional artillery, air defense, and armor would improve Iran's chances of achieving a significant military success in the near term. [REDACTED]

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Iranian Options

Tehran is probably weighing carefully the potential risks and rewards of a massive assault. A large attack on the southern front would encounter Iraq's strongest defenses, but Iran's strategic position there is the best it has been in many years and continues to be strengthened by transportation and logistics improvements. Such an operation almost certainly would result in enormous Iranian casualties, but the regime may be willing to absorb such losses to achieve a decisive victory. Tehran has long believed that the fall of Al Basrah would be a devastating symbolic and military blow to Iraq. It may calculate that a massive attack--involving 150,000 or more Revolutionary Guard, militia, and regular Army forces--would crush the Iraqis. [REDACTED]

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Tehran may choose instead to intensify its military pressure on Iraq with small to medium-size attacks of less than 100,000 men each. It could launch these attacks almost anywhere along the border to optimize its advantage of surprise. Iran probably would target northern areas, tactically significant border towns like Baqrah, or those of strategic value such as Al Kut, to disperse Iraqi forces and keep them off balance. Moreover, the Iranians would be able to maintain their flexibility, and could then mass their forces for a main thrust at one or two places to try to breakthrough Iraqi defenses. Any capture of Iraqi territory--even if only temporary--would further erode Iraqi morale and diminish Saddam's political standing.

Although Iran is capable of executing either option, chances are better than even that it would achieve some success with small to medium-size attacks. Its chances of success with a massive assault are probably less. Preparations for smaller operations are easier to conceal, and several attacks would confuse the Iraqis, making it difficult for

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them to locate the main thrust and organize a defense against it. Moreover, the Iranians--because they would commit fewer forces--would sustain far fewer casualties even if they failed, and avoid the possibility of a decisive defeat.

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On balance, we believe the leadership in Tehran will conclude that several small to medium-size attacks would involve the least risk. Iranian leaders probably are still mindful of supply and coordination problems that contributed to the failure of large offensives in 1984 and 1985. Nonetheless, we cannot rule out the possibility that the psychological appeal of a single decisive victory will prompt the clerical regime to launch a massive assault.

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Outlook

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Unless Baghdad alters its war-fighting policies and uses its air and ground forces more effectively to break up Iranian preparations, or to eliminate Iranian penetrations, its forces are likely to suffer significant defeats. Even two or three modest victories would bolster Iranian resolve to continue the war and perhaps encourage it to hold out for the establishment of an Islamic Republic in Baghdad. If Iran were to capture an important target, such as Al Basrah, this could set in motion a series of events that would imperil the Ba'thist regime.

If, on the other hand, Tehran launches a massive assault and fails, then its ability to mount another major offensive would be seriously impaired. We estimate that it would

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need at least another six months to resupply its forces, mobilize more men, and prepare for another operation. Moreover, the massive casualties Iran would suffer if Iraq maintains strong defenses almost certainly would prompt the clerical regime to try to ease the public outcry by temporarily standing down on attacks. For Iraq, a significant victory might offset the demoralizing impact of heavy losses by strengthening national pride and renewing hopes for at least a defacto ceasefire. [REDACTED]

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Although we take seriously Iran's announced intention to end the war within the next six to eight months, the Supreme Defense Council might postpone a large offensive, particularly if it believed that Baghdad had detected tactical preparations or had received warning of the attack. Tehran canceled a major offensive it was preparing to launch in June 1985, in part because it believed it had lost the element of surprise and would lose disastrously if it carried out the operation. Other factors, such as a belief that its arms supplies would be inadequate, or coordination problems between the Army and Revolutionary Guard, also might prompt Iranian leaders to delay or cancel its plans for an operation. [REDACTED]

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Nonetheless, even if Tehran were to decide not to launch a major offensive before spring, Iraq would continue to face significant military, economic, and political problems. Baghdad probably would not take advantage of a reprieve to significantly improve the military's effectiveness given Saddam's proclivity for inflexibility and inaction when presented with opportunities to seize the military initiative. [REDACTED] Iraqi leadership 25X1
[REDACTED] Its strategy of static defense is working and that STAT 25X1
Iranian economic problems will eventually force Tehran to reduce its war effort. In our judgment, however, such a course, combined with Iraq's own worsening economic situation, will further increase popular dissatisfaction with the war and diminish support for the regime. [REDACTED]

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**Director of
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Is Iraq Losing the War?

Special National Intelligence Estimate

Secret

*SNIE 34/36/2-86
April 1986*

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